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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BEIRUT 000822

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA/FO, NEA/ELA

ALSO FOR IO A/S BRIMMER

P FOR DRUSSELL, RRANGASWAMY

USUN FOR WOLFF/GERMAIN/SCHEDLBAUER

NSC FOR SHAPIRO, MCDERMOTT

DOD/OSD FOR FLOURNOY/KAHL/DALTON

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PINR](#) [UNSC](#) [MARR](#) [MOPS](#) [IS](#) [LE](#)

SUBJECT: LEBANON: HIZBALLAH ON THE DEFENSE WHILE STRIVING
FOR NATIONAL UNITY

REF: BEIRUT 819

Classified By: Ambassador Michele J. Sison for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

11. (C) In a series of public addresses over the last week, Hizballah SYG Hassan Nasrallah has raised the rhetoric of a possible war with Israel while simultaneously offering conciliatory words to PM-designate Saad Hariri as he attempts to form a government. March 14 figures welcome Nasrallah's internal posture while worrying about his external rhetoric. The explosion of a suspected Hizballah arms depot on July 14 drove the party to ratchet up pressure in South Lebanon until PM-designate Hariri was forced to intervene. While analysts do not believe Hizballah would initiate military activity against Israel without an Israeli attack on Iran, the three incidents in the south over the last week point to the danger of a small event -- even an unplanned one -- spiraling out of control. End summary.

HIZBALLAH WAVERS BETWEEN
AGGRESSION AND CONCILIATION

12. (U) In a series of public addresses over the last week, Hizballah SYG Hassan Nasrallah has raised the rhetoric of a possible war with Israel while simultaneously offering conciliatory words to PM-designate Saad Hariri as he attempts to form a government. After meeting on July 12 to commemorate the third anniversary of the beginning of the 2006 war, Hizballah SYG Hassan Nasrallah and Vice President of the Higher Shia Council Sheikh Abdel-Amir Qabalan said it was necessary to confront Israeli aggression against Lebanese affairs and to also maintain an atmosphere of calm, communication, and dialogue. During a July 17 speech marking the first anniversary since Israel and Hizballah exchanged prisoners of war, Nasrallah underscored Hizballah's duty is to liberate "all POWs," noting that Israel had returned all but one (Yehya Skaff) and that Hizballah intended to pursue the case of the four Iranian diplomats missing in Lebanon since the civil war. He further called for resolution on the issue of Lebanese missing in Syria and Syrians missing in Lebanon. However, in a July 20 speech eulogizing late Muslim

leader Fathi Yakan, Nasrallah called on Muslims worldwide to adopt the culture of resistance noting, "We hear of a new war being planned against Lebanon as Israel escalates its tone." Nasrallah further called on Lebanese to "once again embrace the resistance."

MARCH 14 WARILY WELCOMES
NASRALLAH'S CALL
FOR PATIENCE IN CABINET FORMATION

¶13. (U) Exuding calmness in his July 17 speech, Nasrallah called upon all sides to give Hariri time to form a cabinet. Stressing that Hizballah was embracing the spirit of national cooperation and partnership, he indicated that his party would "not mind and would even be supportive" if its allies in the opposition agreed with the majority to exclude Hizballah from the new cabinet. Noting that some March 14 figures were wary of any detente between the opposition and the majority, Nasrallah said that these overtures reflected the will of the people and that Hizballah would "not be provoked." Nasrallah also noted that Hizballah had not and would not seek any guarantees on its arms or the Special Tribunal for Lebanon.

¶14. (C) Immediately after the speech, Future MP Bassem al-Shab commented to Pol/Econ Chief that Nasrallah's remarks were "subdued and nearly pacifist in nature." Another Future MP, Michel Pharaon, said that he was reminded of Nasrallah's "enjoy the summer" comment made in a speech several weeks before the outbreak of the July 2006 war. Pharaon added, "I

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think he intended to call for a pleasant summer, but when the phone rings from Iran...."

WEAPONS DEPOT EXPLOSION
SPARKS HIZBALLAH DISTRACTIONS

¶15. (C) Hizballah's media campaign was derailed by the explosion of an apparent Hizbollah arms depot in Khirbet Selm, the subsequent joint UNIFIL/LAF investigation, and a violation of the Blue Line near Kfar Shouba (reftel). Local press reported that Israeli reinforcements took up positions in Kfar Shouba in the event residents made a move against an Israeli military outpost. UNIFIL and the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) continue their investigation into the weapons cache belonging to Hizballah while the party accuses UNIFIL of violating UN Security Council Resolution 1701 because "it is acting on its own without coordinating with the LAF."

¶16. (C) In an attempt to deflect the blame from its own violation of UNSCR 1701, Hizballah officials have renewed their complaints that Israeli overflights violate the resolution that ended the July 2006 war. Declaring that Israeli violations have "exceeded ten times per day," Hizballah MP Nawaf Moussawi warned, "no country, including Israel, can stop the resistance from taking action." In case he did not list enough reasons to justify aggression against Israel, Moussawi added, "We are ready to liberate Ghajar if the Lebanese government gives up on it." Our interlocutors also assess that the violation of the Blue Line at Kfar Shouba was a joint Amal/Hizbollah effort to deflect attention from the explosion investigation. Urged by UNSCOL Michael Williams to defuse the rising series of confrontations on the southern border, PM-designate Saad Hariri called Nabih Berri and Hezbollah MP Ali Hassan Khalil. Berri and Khalil agreed to lower the temperature by canceling another demonstration planned for Kfar Shouba on July 22.

LEBANESE CHATTER ABOUT WAR PROSPECTS,
BUT HIZBALLAH ACTION
UNLIKELY WITHOUT IRANIAN PRESSURE

¶7. (C) The chattering class of Beirut has taken to predicting an new flare-up between Israel and Hezbollah. According to Nicholas Noe, editor of Mideastwire news service, Hezbollah has concluded that Israel is planning to attack Lebanon, and is therefore shoring up national unity, posing itself as blameless, and framing Israel as Lebanon's "crazy, belligerent neighbor." However, Paul Salem, director of the Carnegie Middle East Institute in Beirut, believes that Lebanon is safe in the short term but risks rise in the medium term if there is not a resolution between the United States and Iran on the nuclear issue.

¶8. (C) Hezbollah does not want to pressure UNIFIL or change the status quo, presidential advisor Naji Abi Assi told the Ambassador on July 21. Despite Walid Jumblatt's fears of a coming Israeli-Iranian conflagration and its repercussions in Lebanon, nothing has changed on the Lebanese political scene.

While some, such as Hariri, fear an Israeli attack on Hezbollah to distract from pressures on Israel to pursue regional peace, the Lebanese consensus is on maintaining UNSCR 1701 as it is. President Sleiman will address this point during his speech on Army Day (August 1).

COMMENT

¶9. (C) Events on the ground in Lebanon have rapid consequences. While Hezbollah commemorated the third anniversary of the July 2006 war, most observers rejected the likelihood of an imminent war between Israel and Lebanon. The weapons cache explosion shifted Hezbollah from an offensive position to a defensive one, pushing the group to re-justify why it possesses weapons in violation of UNSCR

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1701 and driving it to generate dangerous incidents near the Blue Line. Barring a regional conflagration, it is unlikely that Hezbollah will provoke Israel again, especially as the Shia of the south continue to rebuild from the 2006 war and Lebanese enjoy a quiet summer. However, the three incidents in the south over the last week point to the danger of a small event -- even an unplanned one -- spiraling out of control. The next possible flashpoint is the ongoing joint UNIFIL/LAF investigation into the July 14th arms depot explosion, especially given UNIFIL's desire to inspect buildings to which materials from the site of the explosion may have been moved. End comment.

SISON